



Ambassador Lewis Lukens
U.S. Independence Day Reception
U.S. Embassy NEC
Wednesday, April 24, 2013

(As prepared)

I want to welcome each of you to our celebration of the 237th anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America.

This year, we have chosen to mark our nation's birthday in April. This is to recognize Earth Day, which is being celebrated by people around the world this week. When I run along the Corniche and admire the beauty of the Atlantic Ocean, I realize how much this ocean unites all of us, Americans and Senegalese. By spending so much of my free time outside, I also experience the connection between the health of the environment, and our personal health.

Usually on a country's national day, an Ambassador will talk about our history and democracy -- which is really important -- but this year, I wanted to do something different in support not just of our nations, but our shared environment.

I would like to consider how our democratic responsibilities include caring for the environment as much as we care for our own homes and bodies. On any given day, we have countless opportunities to make the right choice for the environment. We can choose to take public transportation to cut down on carbon emissions. We can water plants in the evening to reduce evaporation, or we can simply place trash in the proper receptacles. Of all the things that we can do, and say about the environment, one thing is for sure. And while it may sound like a cliché, the environment knows no boundaries. Man-made borders -- even natural barriers like oceans and seas -- do not separate one part of our environment from another. The air belongs to us all. The water touches us all. We need to be concerned not just about American air and water for Americans, or Senegalese air and water for Senegalese -- but for the benefit of all of our peoples.

Maintaining sustainable environmental conditions was one of the main topics of the most recent presidential campaign in the United States. President Obama has called climate change "one of the biggest issues of this generation." Secretary of State John Kerry has also been passionate about the climate during his entire career as a senator. Issues such as responsible fossil fuel extraction, renewable energy, and negative health effects of pollution are the source of great concern in both the U.S. and developing world.

When we marshal the necessary resources to care for the environment, we all reap the benefits.

One exciting trend in the United States is the prevalence of new industries created through the development of green technology. In addition to benefiting our health, renewable and green technologies can serve as a catalyst for job creation and impact industries such as tourism in a very positive way. Not to mention, greater access to renewable energy sources can offer us energy independence -- which is, let us not forget, another tenant of the American democratic model.

On the issue of environmental protection, I want to recognize Senegal's efforts. President Sall recently returned from a successful meeting with President Obama in the White House. President Sall was recognized by the Blue Frontier Campaign with its yearly award for "Excellence in National Ocean Stewardship," in recognition of rescinding foreign fishing permits in his nation's Exclusive Economic Zone soon after being elected. I understand that President Sall is now moving forward to establish a sustainable domestic fishery free of foreign exploitation, creating a marine resource management model for West Africa and the world.

As part of our commitment to the environment and our partnership with Senegal, USAID is active in biodiversity and natural resources conservation and management. Peace Corps volunteers engage in environmental education and development of small and medium enterprises, including those in eco-tourism. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is spearheading a project using wasps as a natural bio-control to protect mango crops in the Casamance from devastating fruit fly destruction. Many of our Embassy employees and family members participate informally on what we call a "Green Team" to take pro-environment action to make our work and living area cleaner and safer. Just this week, the Green Team led a trash pick-up around the neighborhood.

Finally, it is special for us to hold this event in our New Embassy which is one of the most ecologically-advanced buildings in West Africa: Not only do we recycle our water for keeping those lovely lawns green; use energy-saving electricity; and host solar panels. You also may have noticed the giant batteries on your way in this evening: They are to charge our fleet of hybrid electric cars which you will be seeing around Dakar. We are excited about these developments and grateful that you are here with us this evening to celebrate them with us.

This evening truly could not have been possible without the generous help of our private sector sponsors. Some of them have been long-time sponsors of our National Days, and to all of them we are very grateful: Hewlett-Packard, Pfizer, Citibank, APR Energy, General Electric, Ernst & Young, L'Africaine de l'Automobile, KPMG, Fortesa, Cabinet Aziz Dieye, UPS-Senegal, Computers Frontiers, Hertz, Saudequip, and Coca-Cola. Thank you all. (PAUSE TO MAKE EYE CONTACT OUT, AND IN CASE THERE IS APPLAUSE.)

And thank you, our guests, for coming this evening. This event gives us an opportunity to celebrate the great work that we have done together as partners and allies. The United States of America and the Republic of Senegal have accomplished so much, and we share so much in

common: democracy, pride in independence, and the blessings of liberty and enduring friendship. There is still much to do but for now, let's enjoy the party.